My Thoughts on the "Information Highway: Mental Pollution"

by Tim Swenson
swensotc@ss2.sews.wpafb.af.mil

I thought I would take a minute to discuss my views on the article by Jacques-Yves Cousteau in the last issue of the CATS Newsletter. I could not let it go without saying something.

Jacques-Yves Cousteau has joined in on an ever enlargening voice decrying the costs or downside of the Internet. Mr. Cousteau has also included other high technology mediums like cable TV, multimedia, cellular phones, CD-ROM, etc, in his voice. I don't mind these folks pointing out the fact that we must control this technology and not let it control us, but I do object when they say that we should not pursue such technology.

Mr. Cousteau's arguement is that such technologies are flooding our minds. It is taking time away from our children and our lives. He argues that the costs are too high for such technology.

All it takes to overcome this flood is something as basically human as will power. Yes, it is easy to spend hours surfing the Internet or watching TV. It's just a matter of will power to use the technology for what you need and then turn it off. If you only want to access the Internet for e-mail, then only do that. No one is forcing you to browse the World Wide Web. You control how much information you want and get. If it's too much, turn it off.

One method of "proof" I use is analogies. It sometimes helps to view a new idea in light of something that you already know. So lets compare the Internet or cable TV with two mediums we already know well, the Phone and Mail (US Post Office type).

I could spend hours everyday talking on the phone with friends, or calling all sorts of free information numbers. Sort of surfing the phone net, as it were. Yet, most of us resist the tempation to do this.

I could get tons of information brought to my house through mail. I could subscribe to tens or hundreds of magazines and be overloaded with information. Again, this is something that we all resist.

These new technologies provide one key item: choice. Cable TV gives me a greater variety of TV programs to choose from, allowing me to get the most out of the time I spend watching. The Internet gives me greater choice of information, including things that I could not get easily through more traditional mediums. Have you ever tried to get Australian Rules Football scores from a sports magazine? Not in the US.

The cost of these new technologies is the price we all have to pay in learning to make choices, especially choices about what not to do or watch. With a little common sense and some good will power, we all can surf the Internet at our own pace.

One one final note to Mr. Cousteau: if it were not for the mental pollution of cable TV, few would know who you are or what you do.

[**Ed.** Note: As an ex-SCUBA instructor, I should also point out that Mr. Cousteau, along with Mr. Gagnan, developed the open-circuit SCUBA "technology" that opened the world's reefs to the visits and predation of sport divers.]

Two Words From the Editor:

December will be the next Paste-up Month. Bring the articles you'd like to see in the newsletter and I'll pick them up to include in the newsletter. Or post them to the club address on the internet (see back page).

Do we have your internet address? I propose setting up a "CATS mailing list" to distribute comments of interest to the members.

Dealing WITH Sailor:

Go Where you Want: The WWW/gopher Connection.
by **Robert Diggs**
rd0007@epfl2.epflbalto.org

Logon to SAILOR's <u>GOPHER</u>.

At the main Menu—choose: "Search Sailor."

Type in "united nations" <enter>.

Choose #10, "Other UN Sites."

Press space bar for second page—choose #21 World Health Org.

Choose #8 WHO's Web Server <enter>

Login as WWW

At the main screen press G

In the box type the address of the website you want.
start with "http://", then the rest of URL as listed—for example--http://ipl.sils.umich.edu

You can connect to any web site you have the URL for.

[Ed. note: As of October '95, Sailor is upgrading LYNX, and phasing their GOPHER out. The changes to LYNX are useful, but if GOPHER is discontinued, this door will close.]

Time's Up:
The Crash of 1/1/00
by **Dan Rattiner**
From: June, 1995 **LISTing Newsletter**
Contributed by Ruth Fegley

Scientists know, down to the minute, when catastrophe is going to strike. When I tell you what this problem is you will say that this is no big deal. But it is. It is a deal on the order of 50 or 60 billion dollars. And it is a big deal because the executives of giant corporations who are going to be called upon to spend this money in the next few years may think it is something they can just ignore. It seems so stupid. And so unnecessary. And such a hit on their bottom line. But they will ignore it at their peril.

Perhaps the best way to describe The problem of THE CENTURY DATE CHANGE is to explain how it came about. In 1960 the first practical computers were developed in America. And the programmers, at that time, decided on a shortcut.

They decided that January 1, 1961 could be written as 1-1-61. The "19" part of the year wasn't really necessary. And by writing it as 61 instead of 1961 then, could save two keystrokes of memory in the computer. In 1960, was a very important savings. Corporate executives patted programmers on the back who could save two keystrokes in 1960.

Once having begun expressing the year with only two digits, however, the way computers were built never changed. As the years went by, more data was entered, always noting the year with the two digits only. It would, obviously, become a problem in the year 2000, but that was so far away. A programmer who was 25 years old in 1960 would be 65 when the millennium turned. It wouldn't be his problem. He would be ready for retirement. And he would be ready to start getting his pension.

Pension? Once the computers get past 1999, they record the next year a 00 as in 1900. What pension? Our young computer programmer in the year 2001 wouldn't even have been born from the computer's point of view. There's certainly no pension in that.

It is estimated that there are more than 6000 companies that use mainframes in the United States - built and installed before 1995. And there are so many software packages that deal with projects that are on-going for more than five years - mortgages come to mind, bonds, DMV renewals, credit card calculations, insurance studies and the like that use the two digit system. is not going to be pretty. Consider billing systems. Giant companies send out monthly statements that add interest based on when the transaction took place. On New Year's Day 2000, these computers will see the New Year as 00. The computer will think the transactions are more than 100 years old and will charge interest accordingly. Care to make a credit card transaction? In the year 2000, according to the two digit system, the expiration date of the credit card will be earlier than the expiration date. Transaction denied. And then there are time zone problems. A call made from San Francisco to New, York at 2 a.m. on January 1, 2000 will, because of the changes in the time zones, be billed as a 99 year phone call. The scope of the impending catastrophe boggles the mind.

According to Peter Harris of ADPAC, it is possible to fix existing systems but it is an expensive and laborious task similar to that of putting toothpaste back in the tube. Harris talks about millions of lines of coded instructions written by the original programmers that must be "decompiled," and converted into computer languages such as COBOL where they can be modified to express the year as four digits instead of two and then put back into the calculations and returned into the computers.

A point made by William Ulrich, CEO of Tactical Strategy Group is that nobody at large corporations wants to hear this stuff. The costs of making this fix are huge and they are an expense borne with negative impact to the bottom line.

Bill Goodwin, who has a consulting firm called 2000AD, says, "This (fixing of the world's computers) is going to be the biggest maintenance job ever done."

But back in the 1960's, who knew? Saving two keystrokes meant saving 16 bits of information (8 bits a byte). And computers needed every bit they could get. That you can buy a plug in chip for your computer today that will add about four million bits of information for about $49 makes it only seem that much more ludicrous.

In 1960 were almost no computers. Today there are tens

of millions of them. There is one group of scientists who believe that the turning of the millennium will not foul everything up in a jumble of numbers but will instead result in one gigantic computer crash.

If that happens, we will be on a trip back in time to an era when people talked to one another, when telephones had to be dialed, when timers were wind-up, when all clocks had hands on them, when messages were taped to front doors rather than sent E-Mail and when all calculations had to be done with pencil and paper, and then double-checked.

Maybe this wouldn't be so bad.

Dan *Rattiner is Publisher of* Dan's Papers
A News Communication Publication serving Montauk and the Hamptons 5-18-95

Next issue: Cross-platform "Viruses"
[**Ed.** note: Now Ruth, how about sending in a happy story!]
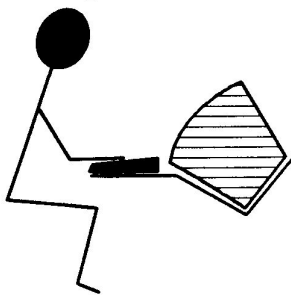

OUCH!

by
Mark Fisher

Ouch indeed! I was carrying my bicycle up the back steps, and my left wrist was bent at a crazy angle. I re-arranged the load, and didn't think anything more about it. On future days, my wrist also hurt, and I learned to change my grip before heading up the stairs.

In the meantime, I was on the computer more - this newsletter and another, documents and spreadsheets for a new job, and an expanded recreational use of Sailor's LYNX WWW server.

And the wrist was hurting at other times now—when I rolled ove on it at night, when I tried to loosen a gas cap, etc. Finally, I asked a physical therapist I know about it, and her response was not what I'd expected:

"Nerve damage—Carpal Tunnel Syndrome;" was her verdict. The pain hadn't been where I expected—I thought the carpal tunnel went down the center of the palm, and the pain I was having was at the "bottom" corner. In fact, further reflection showed that it wasn't Carpal Tunnel Syndrome, but a related nerve structure, where the path fothe ulnar nerve is pinched between two bones in the edge of the wrist.

"But I don't use the keyboard that much!" I protested. I haven't been typing dawn to dusk on insurance forms, or anything like that. She replied that a bad enough position of the keyboard might aggrevate a joint still recovering from other injuries. I do crowd the keyboard, with the keyboard on a utility table, both too high and too close, forcing my wrist to bend outward to square my fingers to the keys.

She sketched out a wrist brace I could make, and showed me several exercises that would help the joint to heal. I've been wearing that brace for a week now. When I wear it, it restricts my movement so that I don't aggrevate the injury. When it's off, I still get twinges—reminders that nerve damage heals slowly, and that I'll have to be more careful in the future.

I haven't changed my keyboard setup yet, but the V-shaped "ergonomic" keyboards suddenly make sense. I want to try a full-on ergonomic "workstation," with a sunken monitor behind a low keyboard:

I'll let you all know how it turns out.

A Virtual Visit to:
# The Historical
Electronics Museum

Founded in 1973 and opened to visitors in 1983, the Historical Electronics Museum is dedicated to the preservation and display of breakthroughs in advanced electronics technology with an emphasis on radar, countermeasures, and communications. The museum is located near the BWI Airport, just south of Baltimore.

Exhibits are set up to promote interaction—visitors can transmit Morse messages, listen to an original Edison cylinder phonograph, or code a message on a German Enigma cipher machine.

Special collections include:
An IEEE exhibit on the evolution of microwave technology, a variety of transmitters and receivers, test equipment development (concentrating on oscillograph and oscilliscope), and the development of airborne radar.

Admission is free. They are open weekdays, 9:00 AM to 3:00 PM, and first Saturdays, 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. They can be contacted at (410) 765-3803.
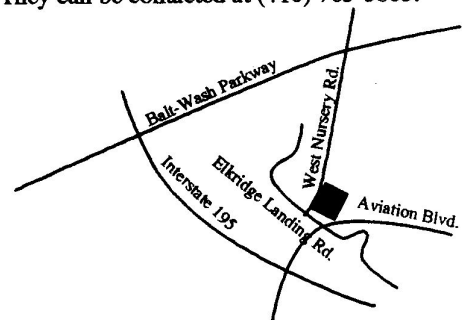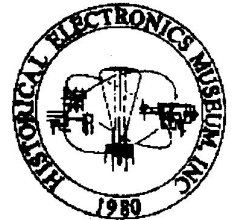
THE CAPITAL AREA TIMEX/ SINCLAIR USERS GROUP is a not-for-profit group serving the interests of those who own, use, or are interested in the Timex/Sinclair family of computers.

Officers:

Chairman	Monthly position
Vice-Chairman	Monthly position
Recording Secretary	Monthly position
Corresponding Secretary	Joe Miller
Treasurer	Barry Washington
Newsletter Editor	Mark Fisher
	(301) 589-7407

Meetings:

Monthly meetings are held from 12:00 N to 4:30 PM on the second Saturday of each month at the New Carrolton Library.

Membership:

User Group memberships cost $10.00 per year, are good for 12 months and include all priveleges (access to software libraries, group buys, etc.).

Mail dues to:

LeBaron (Barry) Washington
7044 Cindy Lane
Annandale VA 22003

Networks

internet: send article submissions (short or long) to our club address, below.

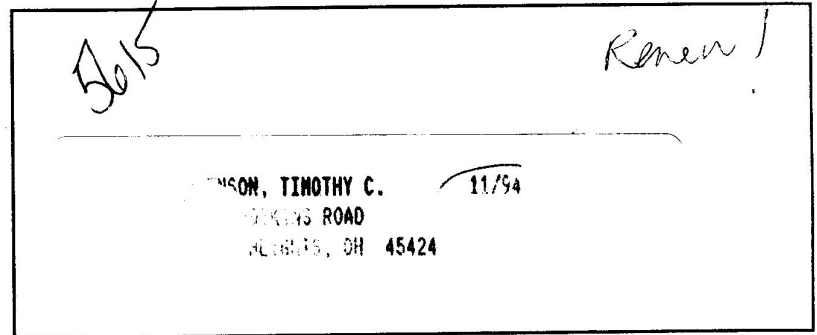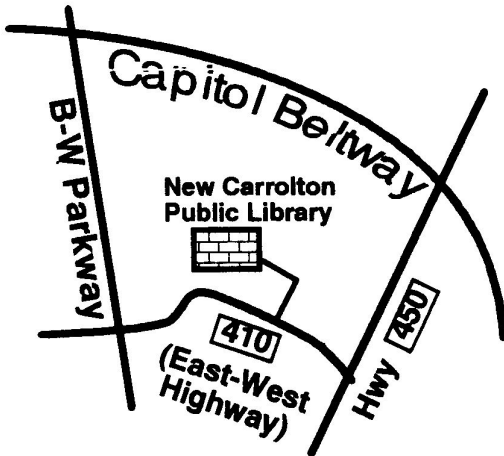**Timex SIG on Compuserve:** Wednesday night 10:00 PM Eastern Standard Time (GO CLUB)

QBOX BBS: (810) 254-9878

CATS on Internet:

mf0002@epfl2.epflbalto.org

CATS Newsletter
7044 Cindy Lane
Annandale VA 22003

FIRST CLASS MAIL

Bob

Renew !

~SON, TIMOTHY C.   11/94
~ ~S ROAD
~~, OH 45424

The next two meetings of CATS will be held on: November 11

and ...   December 9, 1995

(Paste up for January - February)

12:00 N Hardware workshop
2:00 PM General meeting
At: New Carrollton Public Library